A History of Dahlgren Chapel

By Anna Watkins

A two-part series recounts the history of one of Washington's little known but significant Catholic landmarks, underscoring a fruitful collaboration of a university president and donors of great wealth.

Hidden behind the imposing Healy building on the campus of Georgetown University in the charming setting of the quadrangle stands the jewel of Georgetown University's buildings. Flanked by the two oldest structures, "Old South" and "Old North," Dahlgren Chapel greets the visitor in this haven of tranquility with an invitation to meditate, pray, enjoy, and even ponder on what would have motivated the creation of this treasure in such a secluded setting. It was a providential hand that guided tragedy into a blessing by bringing a house of worship to Georgetown.

The Founders

On June 29, 1889, in a brilliant wedding ceremony at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, Elizabeth Drexel became the wife of John Vinton Dahlgren. The cathedral was beautifully decorated with myriads of flowers, and a throng of distinguished relatives and friends of the young couple, both twenty-one years old, crowded into the church. Archbishop Michael C. Corrigan of New York performed the wedding ceremony, followed by a nuptial Mass offered by Father Colton of St. Stephen's church, the pastor of Mrs. Joseph W. Drexel, mother of the bride. The nuptials were a notable social event as both bride and groom were members of prominent families. Elizabeth's father, Joseph William Drexel of the renown banking family, was well known as philanthropist and lover of the arts. Her mother, Lucy Wharton, belonged to a distinguished Philadelphia family. Elizabeth was a cousin of then-Blessed Katharine Mary Drexel, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People. Blessed Katharine's father, Francis Anthony Drexel, was an older brother of Elizabeth's father. Through her uncle's second marriage to Emma Bouvier, Elizabeth also became linked to the forebears of Jacqueline Bouvier, wife of President John F. Kennedy.

John Vinton Dahlgren was born on April 22, 1868, in Valparaiso, Chile, when his father, Admiral John A. Dahlgren was stationed there. The admiral was Commander of the South Pacific Squadron during the Civil War and later Commander of the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. He invented a gun that bears his name. A hall at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis as well as a town in Virginia and its local naval base were named in his memory. John's mother, nee Madeline Vinton, the daughter of Samuel Finley Vinton, a longtime congressman from Ohio, was a noted writer in her time.

Being part of the social elite, the couple received of course a host of beautiful and valuable presents. But the most precious gift was the betrothal ring of Martin Luther and Katherina von Bora, which had belonged to the Dahlgren family for over 250 years. For John Vinton Dahlgren the month of June 1889 was especially memorable because only four days before his marriage he graduated as valedictorian of his class at Georgetown, with a BA degree and as recipient of the Toner Scientific Medal. To make their happiness complete, the young couple was blessed with the arrival of baby Joseph Drexel Dahlgren in 1890. Life for John and Elizabeth had a wonderful beginning, and all omens augured well for a happy and successful future. But their blissful existence was short lived.

Birth of the Chapel

Disaster struck when on July 26, 1891, baby Joseph died of pneumonia at Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, at the tender age of sixteen months. Guided by

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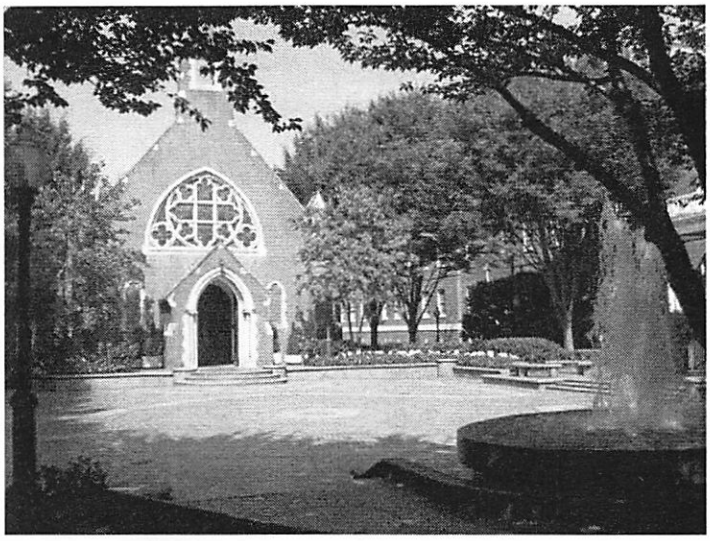


***Dahlgren Chapel,** on the campus of Georgetown University.*

their close connection with John's alma mater, the grief stricken parents decided to bury their son on the grounds of Georgetown College. It was their intention to build a small mortuary chapel somewhere along the "walks" on campus. This would be the first time that a building at Georgetown was financed with outside private funds and came to be known by a non-Jesuit name. In response to their request, Father J. Havens Richards, S.J., president of Georgetown University, gave permission to bury the baby temporarily in the college graveyard, following a private funeral Mass in the boys' chapel in "Old North."

In the early days, Georgetown College, a Catholic institution, had no place of worship for its students. They used a room in "Old North" as chapel while Trinity church served as the college's church where the president of the college served as pastor. In 1833 Father Thomas F. Mulledy, S.J., an alumnus of Georgetown and twice its president, managed to generate enough money to erect a building on the south side of the quadrangle to serve as a student center. It included a students' chapel on the second floor, but the "Mulledy" building, later on the Jesuit residence, soon proved inadequate as the student body was steadily increasing. It was due to the vision, courage, power of persuasion, and frequent interventions of Father Richards that this worrisome situation found a solution.

In view of the need for a house of worship for students, Richards decided to persuade the Dahlgrens to change their offer and build a larger chapel. It is doubtful that he anticipated the considerable burden that the erection of a new chapel and particularly the financing of the project would add to his other responsibilities which included the elaborate preparations for Georgetown's centennial celebration and the expansion of the school.

After discussing the Dahlgrens' intention with Father Thomas J. Campbell, S.J., Provincial of the Baltimore-New York Province, Father Richards suggested that the couple build an edifice large enough to serve as a burial place for all members of the Dahlgren family and also as a devotional center for the college. But Elizabeth disagreed with his proposal as she considered a grand building inappropriate for a baby. She committed $10,000 for the erection of a small chapel and asked Richards to select an architect and submit plans for the building. Henry A. Simpson of the Washington firm of Charles E. Barry & Henry A. Simpson was chosen from among several competitors.

Father Richards, however, did not want to let this opportunity for a larger house of worship go by and suggested an alternative: would the Dahlgrens agree to delay building until their funds would permit an additional commitment? But they did not change their minds and insisted on building a small chapel, and immediately. Still optimistic, Richards persisted and offered another proposal: if the college would borrow the additional $20,000 required for a larger building, would they give a firm commitment to repay the loan later on as their finances would allow? This time his resoluteness paid off. Elizabeth and John accepted his plan. Overjoyed, he informed the provincial that the Dahlgrens agreed to donate $30,000 for the erection of a "students' chapel"; they would pay $10,000 during the course of 1892 and the remaining $20,000 in yearly installments. Meantime, the college would contract a loan for the latter amount at the low interest rate of five percent, which the Dahlgrens themselves would not be able to obtain. But that was not the end of the struggle as more hurdles loomed on the horizon for Richards to overcome.

The first setback came when the architects indicated their doubts about the possibility of building the chapel in the elegant style envisaged by the Dahlgrens for $30,000. But the architects agreed to redraw their plans with a view to economizing on building costs. Hence "we are in suspense," Father Richards wrote to the provincial. As to the location of the chapel, the architects recommended the west side of the quadrangle, both for aesthetic reasons as

well as for the convenience of accessibility, rather than the walks on the college grounds. Carried away with grandiose ideas, they envisaged that at some future date the South and North buildings should be connected to the chapel by covered walkways, which would be extended around the quadrangle like the interior court of a cloister. Meantime the decision was taken to go ahead, and with the permission of the provincial, the local firm of Addison & Larcombe, who had obtained the building contract, broke ground on December 20, 1891, with excavations on the quadrangle to lower the ground by about five feet to the level of the first floors of Healy Hall and "Old South."

Next Father Richards was faced with an unwelcome surprise. The architects' new proposal included an estimate of $42-$45,000 for building the chapel, about fifty percent more than the agreed amount. The architects felt strongly that the chapel should accommodate at least 400 persons and have spacious facilities to conduct services with comfort and decorum. They argued that it would be a waste of money to build a small chapel for fewer people and that the additional expense was worth it. The builder not only supported the architects' offer, but also warned that delaying the project would only increase costs as prices would most likely rise. Perhaps intending to soften the blow, Richards told the provincial that the estimated cost would run to only $40,000, somewhat less than the architects' estimate, and expressed his hope that the Dahlgrens "will pay the whole of it. Let us pray that it may be so."

Although Mrs. Dahlgren stood firm in her commitment of a maximum of $30,000, Richards tried to persuade the provincial to permit going ahead with the revised plans, as efforts to economize were not successful. Also, he knew that the Dahlgrens had originally set aside $50,000 for the project, and only when learning about his estimate that the chapel would cost $30,000 did they pledge this amount. The provincial, however, was against borrowing more than the original $30,000, "because some caprice might seize the Madam later on when the novelty would wear off and the College would be left to pay off the borrowed amount." Yet Father Richards remained undeterred in his endeavor to finance a larger chapel. He finally persuaded the provincial to permit the college to borrow the additional $15,000 against a firm commitment by the Dahlgrens to repay when their financial situation

Elizabeth Drexel and John Vinton Dahlgren.

would allow. He pointed out that

> It would be a folly to build a small chapel. We already have 250 persons, students and community who attend services in the chapel at Mulledy and the number is steadily increasing, this year 40-50 students more. By incurring this debt of $15,000 we shall not only obtain a chapel worth $45,000, but we shall also be able to use the present chapel in Mulledy for a dormitory or study hall.

Father Richards knew "that the Dahlgrens had already made legal provisions to leave a large amount of money to Georgetown.... Mr. and Mrs. Dahlgren will eventually do the whole thing, I am confident." Further, the interest on $15,000, at five percent, i.e. $750 annually, would present no financial burden on Georgetown. Richards found support in his efforts from his lawyer, who also was the advisor at the college. At last, on April 5, 1892, Richards wrote to the provincial that he had given orders to proceed with the building and two days later announced with relief and gratitude "Work has actually begun on Dahlgren chapel. Deo gratias." He also intended to offer a Mass on April 7 for the intention of the Dahlgrens and in every succeeding month as long as he remained president of George-

town.

From the very beginning Elizabeth had her own ideas about the physical layout of the chapel as well as the interior décor and would remain intimately involved in its creation. She preferred the Gothic style and the same stone as the college buildings with "not much ornamentation inside and out" and even specified the type of ivy for the outside walls. She also made clear her wish that the chapel should be dedicated to the Sacred Heart rather than bear her name. However, her desire was not fulfilled. While the menu for the dinner after the consecration in 1893 referred to "The Chapel of the Sacred Heart" with "Dahlgren Memorial Chapel" in brackets underneath, over the years "Dahlgren Chapel" became the popular name. Moreover, the family name has been used to describe the fountain in the quadrangle and the quadrangle itself.

It is worth noting that virtually all negotiations were conducted by correspondence as the Dahlgrens had changed their domicile. After John completed his studies at Georgetown Law School where he earned LLB and MA degrees in June 1891, the couple moved to New York City. There John worked at the law firm of Lord, Day and Lord. Also, John was permitted to practice law at the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia and later admitted to the New York bar.

While negotiating the financing of the chapel the Dahlgrens established a close relationship with Father Richards and became loyal supporters of Georgetown. To encourage the study of science and higher mathematics, John established the Dahlgren Calculus Medal to be awarded to the winner of a special contest. Over the years they made several gifts to the college museum, including a chess set exquisitely carved out of apple and cherry wood by Edward Lang of Oberammergau, Germany. Another precious gift was a silver casket, adorned with old Ceylon garnets, to contain the original parchment document of the charter for Georgetown College. This present was received with great joy. "All the Fathers were delighted and found it rich yet in such excellent taste," Father Richards commented, adding, he "could not imagine anything more exquisite for the purpose."

It is evident that Father Richards' perseverance and adept handling of a difficult financial situation made this first important step in the creation of the chapel possible. But this was only the beginning of his contributions, for several years he would remain closely involved in the details of the interior décor of the chapel, which, together with his other duties, would eventually take a toll on his health.

Building and Decorating the Chapel

On May 19, 1892, a large crowd, including the Dahlgrens, gathered to witness James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, lay the cornerstone for the chapel. In his sermon Gibbons recalled that in former times building houses of worship was limited to emperors, kings, and princes. Now, he noted, the honor was shared with those whose generosity and love inspire them to erect monuments to our Father in heaven. He thanked the young couple and expressed the hope that "Hither the students will come to implore the God of Light to illumine their intelligences and to inflame their hearts with Divine love. Here they will have learned that all human science without a knowledge of God is vain." The copper box placed in the cornerstone included daily newspapers, a full description of the chapel, a photograph of the Dahlgrens, a Latin inscription on parchment honoring the couple, a Georgetown College catalogue, coins of the year, and relics of saints donated by the Convent of the Visitation in Washington.

Respecting Elizabeth's wishes, the builders erected a chapel of red brick trimmed with Indiana limestone in the thirteenth-century, English Gothic style inspired by the Cathedral of Orvieto in Italy. The building, measuring almost one hundred feet in length and forty feet in width with transepts extending to sixty feet, was large enough to seat 350 people. The north and south transepts were separated from the nave by triple arches supported by four pillars of Indiana limestone, a gift of the builder. James Farrington Earley carved the capitols in different designs, clusters of grapes, sheaves of wheat, leaves of oak and acanthus, at a cost of $35 each.

The wooden beams on the ceiling symbolizing the bark of Peter created an intimate atmosphere in the chapel. In 1893 the firm of Mullen & Son, Marbleworks, in Baltimore completed the main altar and matching steps in white Carrara marble, a gift of John Dahlgren. Father Richards was well pleased with this addition and wrote the donor: "In truth I

do not know when I have seen an altar that satisfied me as completely." The brass tabernacle was surmounted by a marble pelican feeding her baby with blood from her own breast, the symbol of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist. To enhance the décor, Elizabeth Dahlgren and her mother donated an oaken screen installed behind the main altar. Also an old organ was carefully cleaned, tuned, and moved to the new chapel. Father Richards felt encouraged when, during one of his visits, Father Provincial also expressed his delight and pleasure with the progress made in completing the work.

As a next step, Mrs. Dahlgren wanted the window behind the main altar put in place, and the well known firm, Mayer & Co. of Munich and New York, was chosen to create this significant artwork that featured the Holy Family flanked by St. Elizabeth of Hungary and St. John the Evangelist, the patron saints of the donors. The center rose window with trefoils included the initials IHS, the monogram of the Society of Jesus. The quatrefoils to the right and left of the rose portrayed Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque and Blessed Claude la Colombiere, S. J., who were intimately associated with creating the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Dedication and Consecration of the Chapel

The dedication of the chapel by the provincial, Father Campbell, took place on April 16, 1893, a "brilliant" spring Sunday, at a private ceremony with about fifty people in attendance. Guests included many members of the Jesuit community, but the Dahlgrens were not there. Joyfully Father Richards informed John, "Everyone was delighted with the whole celebration, judging it beautiful and edifying almost beyond description."

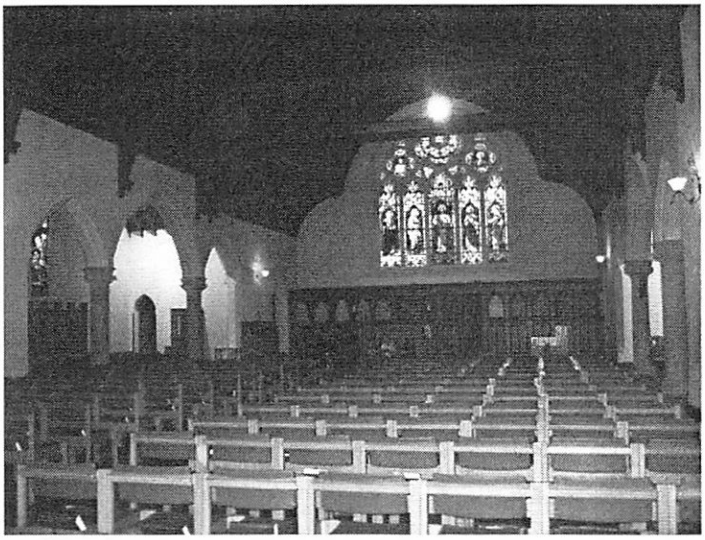
Cardinal Gibbons returned to celebrate the consecration on Friday, June 9, 1893, the feast of the Sacred Heart, amid a crowd of several hundred, including John and Elizabeth Dahlgren and Elizabeth's mother, Mrs. Joseph W. Drexel, as well as representatives of the city and national governments and many other distinguished ladies and gentlemen. Students helped decorate the chapel for the event. The pillars, adorned with ribbons, vines, palms, and flowers, lent a festive background to the golden vestments of the cardinal and priests, gifts of Mrs. Drexel and used for the first time on this occasion. The ceremony began at 6:30 a.m. with the sprinkling of the walls with holy water, followed by a low Mass celebrated by the cardinal in the college's domestic chapel at which time the relics were enclosed in a silver box and placed in the altar. At 11 a.m. Bishop Joseph Van de Vyver of Richmond offered the first Mass in the chapel and Rev. Dr. Denis J. Stafford of St. Peter's Church in Baltimore and professor of oratory at The Catholic University in Washington gave a splendid oration. The *Evening Star* reported that the event was "celebrated with a pomp and impressiveness that has never before been seen in this District." But tragedy cast a shadow on the festive mood of the occasion. While the guests were enjoying a sumptuous dinner after the ceremony, catastrophy struck in downtown Washington when the floors at Ford's Theater, occupied in part by the Office of the Surgeon General, collapsed, killing twenty-one clerks and wounding many others.

About three months later, on September 3, 1893, John and Elizabeth Dahlgren attended the private ceremony where the remains of baby Joseph Drexel Dahlgren were transferred from the college graveyard to the crypt below the chapel, which was reserved for the Dahlgren family.

Important Additions to the Décor

Responding to Elizabeth's wish that, because of its shape, the window in the back of the chapel should show "dark rich tracery" rather than figures, Mayer & Co. installed the striking rose window in December 1894. At the end of that year the stations of the cross in cream, white, and gold colored high reliefs, also a gift of Elizabeth Dahlgren, were mounted on the walls in a simple molding. The bell in the tower over the east end of the chapel, cast in 1814 for the Calvert Mansion in Riverdale, Maryland, was also installed in the early 1890's.

The year 1896 witnessed two major additions to the interior. The Dahlgrens decided to erect altars and install windows in the transepts in honor of their patron saints. In March 1895 John had been commissioned first assistant attorney in the Department of Buildings of New York City and, a year later, promoted to the position of attorney of the department. In gratitude he decided to erect an altar in the north transept to commemorate St. John the Evangelist, but left the design and décor to his wife.



Interior of Dahlgren Chapel today.

Elizabeth wanted to install an altar in the south transept in honor of her patroness, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, as a sacrifice to God and a petition for John "that he may conduct the affairs of his large office with prudence and wisdom." The altars were created by V.A. Fucigna & Bro. according to the design by Constable Bros., architects, both of New York. Mayer & Co. was again selected among several competitors to create both windows.

The altars were consecrated on December 20, 1896, by Bishop A. Curtis of Wilmington, Delaware. In response to his request the students were granted a holiday which caused great joy, particularly as it extended their Christmas vacation. As an expression of gratitude for her many contributions, Elizabeth received the silver trowel Father Richards used for laying the cornerstones for the altars. He also wrote to her in glowing terms, "If you could realize what an immense benefit your Chapel is and what a powerful influence for good it exercises over the students, you would, I am sure, feel greatly repaid for all your sacrifices." In the same year a brass plaque, representing yet another memento to the benefactress, was placed on the right wall of the chapel vestibule. The vestibule's mosaic floor also bore a brass tablet with a Latin inscription describing Elizabeth's contribution.

Important decisions still had to be made regarding the décor for the windows in the nave. Elizabeth was particularly interested in selecting the appropriate saints for the windows intending "to do what will please the head of the Society." Nevertheless, she had definite opinions on the selection of subjects and the decorative details. For example, she deemed that Joan of Arc's armor should be silver, her garment blue and ornamented with fleur de lis and that she should wear a large hat with a white feather. Blessed Thomas More, however, should be without gown and his cloak long, but allowing low cut shoes with silver buckles to be seen. At her suggestion also the birth and death dates of each saint were included beneath their names. In addition to the Dahlgrens' donations, others in the Georgetown community made contributions, in the form of sanctuary furnishings for the new chapel.

The Demise of John Vinton Dahlgren

While completion of the chapel was nearing, John Dahlgren's health was gradually deteriorating. Failing eyesight necessitated his resignation from the Department of Buildings one year after his appointment. Nevertheless he managed to write and publish a manual, *Laws Relating to the Department of Buildings in the City of New York,* in 1895. The publication was well received, and it was said, "If Mr. Dahlgren has not founded a hospital, he has at least prevented hundreds from entering a hospital." In the following year John was appointed commissioner from New York County to the state board of charities. He also provided his professional services to several organizations, including Catholic University where he served as legal advisor.

John's frail health gave rise to serious concerns among his family and friends, including Father Richards. Unfortunately, their apprehensions were not unfounded. Hoping that the mountain air would repair his condition, the family moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado. But he finally succumbed to his lung ailment and died there on August 11, 1899. His body lay in state in a small parlor in Georgetown's Healy Building, and Father John D. Whitney, S.J., president of the university, celebrated the requiem Mass in Dahlgren Chapel. Elizabeth, John's brother Eric, his wife, and other members of the family were present. His own precarious physical condition prevented Father Richards from preaching the sermon, but he was able to attend the funeral service. John's body was laid to rest in the crypt of the chapel next to his infant son.

An extensive bibliographical note will be included in part two of this article, scheduled to appear in our next issue.

A History of Dahlgren Chapel (Part II)

By Anna Watkins

In Part I of this article, which appeared in our last issue, historian Watkins examined the planning and construction of Georgetown University's chapel, a fruitful collaboration between philanthropists John and Elizabeth Drexel Dahlgren and Jesuit Father J. Havens Richards, Georgetown's president. Part I concluded with the death of John Dahlgren in 1899 and his burial in the chapel that he and his wife founded.

New Features and Major Renovations

A half-century would pass after John Dahlgren's death before the chapel underwent its first major renovation. Over the years the building had shown signs of neglect, and by the 1950s it had became obvious that extensive and costly repairs needed to be made. The interior paint had peeled off, the heating and air conditioning systems required updating, and, most noticeable, the outside walls, overgrown with ivy, called for cleaning.

By a fortunate coincidence the money for the needed renovation came also from a member of the Dahlgren family. John Vinton Dahlgren, Jr., the second son of John and Elizabeth Dahlgren, saw the deplorable state of the chapel and offered the university a sum of money for the erection of a new house of worship on campus. However, Father Charles J. Foley, S.J., Director of Development at Georgetown, believed that, while there was an urgent need for repairing the existing chapel, there was no reason for building a new one. He suggested making the repairs in connection with the celebration of the chapel's 60th anniversary in 1953. Dahlgren agreed to the use of his money for this purpose. The local firm of John McShain was selected to carry out the renovations. The ivy was removed, outside walls sandblasted, floors in the transepts lowered to match that in the nave, and the crypt was refurbished. In compliance with John's wish, the main altar and pews were left untouched. In the late 1950s two works of art were added to the newly renovated chapel. The senior class of 1958 donated a hand carved wooden statue of St. Ignatius of Loyola as a memorial to Louis A. Loichot of Canton, Ohio, and Stephen A. Muckerman of St. Louis, Missouri, classmates recently killed in an automobile accident. The five-foot wooden sculpture was initially placed near the main altar of the chapel, and for the last three years it has occupied a prominent place in the Commons of Wolfington Hall, the Jesuit residence. The other donation, a mosaic portrait of Pope Pius X, a copy of a painting at the Nunciatora in Washington, D.C., was commissioned by Edward B. Bunn, S.J., president of the university, and created in Italy. It was a gift of alumni Thomas A. Dean and Bolton Sullivan in memory of Father Bunn's mother.

Georgetown University and many of its benefactors united in an effort to repair and update their beloved chapel in conformity with the dictates of the Second Vatican Council.

Thus the chapel was given a new lease on life, but not for long. In 1964 an event occurred that could again have led to the destruction of the chapel. This time it was the intervention of Georgetown's presidents that saved the building. John Vinton Dahlgren, Jr., died as a result of a stroke that year and was buried in the chapel crypt next to his parents and baby brother. In his will John bequeathed $1.6 million to Georgetown University for the erection of a new chapel to better serve the increasing demands of the university community. But in view of the ecclesiastical privilege of

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saying Mass in the afternoon and evening according to the Second Vatican Council as well as the new chapels on campus, Father Gerald J. Campbell, S.J., president of the university, and his successor, Father Robert J. Henle, S.J., saw no need for another chapel. They had Dahlgren's will interpreted so that part of the legacy could be used for refurbishing Dahlgren Chapel and the remainder for the establishment of an endowment fund for chaplains. Thus Dahlgren Chapel once more escaped demolition; instead it benefited from a number of improvements while enjoying increasing popularity among students and other members of the Georgetown community.

Major changes to the interior of the chapel had to be made in response to the demands of the Second Vatican Council, particularly the requirement for full and active participation of the congregation in the liturgy. The school selected Robert Calhoun Smith of the Washington firm of Smith, Segreti, Stillwell and Hasselman as architect and entrusted the renovations to the local construction company of Tuckman-Barbee. The work included installation of a sanctuary floor of massive wooden pieces extending to the rear of the chapel in order to permit multipurpose use for different occasions. For the same reason the organ console was placed on casters. This Hammond Electric Organ, a gift of Raymond J. Buse, Sr., in memory of his son Louis, had been installed in the chapel in 1946 to replace the old one, which was then beyond repair after so many years of constant use.

To comply with the new rule that the celebrant of the Mass should face the congregation, the altar gates were removed. Also an oak altar surmounted by a rose Levantine marble top was erected in the middle of the sanctuary. The slab in front of the altar came from the original one installed in 1893, as did the piece at the foot of the bronze tabernacle. The tabernacle was placed behind the new altar where, during Mass, it was protected by a closed screen door. Interlocking moveable chairs, wooden kneelers, and kneeling pads replaced the old pews. New stations of the cross, made of ebony and bronze designed by Dolf Ell, were installed. The Rambusch Decorating Company of New York supplied some furnishings for the interior décor, together with new light fixtures.

Renovations included moving the two confessionals from the back of the chapel to the sacristy on the north side, which was transformed into a reconciliation room. Unfortunately, this move highlighted the sharp contrast between the plain back windows and the vivid colors of the other adornments in the chapel. This deficiency was corrected through the generosity of the Arrigan family. In memory of their son Robert Paul, who died in an accident in 1985, the Arrigans gave the window dedicated to St. Isaac Jogues, S.J., to whom Robert had a special devotion, and later, in 1990, a second window depicting John Henry Cardinal Newman. Both windows were created and installed by the Washington Art Glass Studio under the supervision of John T. Boertlein & Associates in Baltimore.

A New Look for the Bicentennial

An extensive renovation of the Dahlgren Chapel took place when Georgetown University celebrated its bicentennial in 1989. The university's Board of Directors approved spending $660,000 for refurbishing all chapels of the university, and the firm of Tuckman-Barbee was again chosen, this time as general contractor, to handle the important work in Dahlgren. John M. Syvertsen, a graduate of Georgetown (A.B. '72) and then a Chicago architect, made the most striking changes by creating a "new look" for the chapel interior. He introduced oak furniture in the sanctuary, as well as reredos in the back, wood wainscoting in the nave and transepts, wrought iron candle stands and the processional cross with the body of Christ sculpted by Frederick C. Shrady. A cross, assumed to date from 1634 and given to Georgetown by a mission in Maryland, was suspended over the sanctuary. The tabernacle, relocated in the north transept, was placed in a cabinet with the old brass doors, adorned with pelicans and marble angels. To improve the altar's visibility, it, along with the lectern and chairs for the priests, were raised to form three platforms on an elevated base.

The renovation dictated other changes. The confessionals were again moved, this time from the north sacristy to a room behind the back reredos of the sanctuary. A welcome improvement was the installation of accent lighting and the addition of delicate, pink glass and wrought iron wall sconces in the

Interior of Dahlgren Chapel, c. 1908.

chapel and its vestibule. These fixtures were not operational, but they evoked a touch of nostalgia as they were reminiscent of the original gas light fixtures donated by Elizabeth Dahlgren.

Frederick Shrady, who had carved the figure on the processional cross, also contributed the painted stations of the cross, which were mounted on the reredos of the north and south transepts. Shrady, a distinguished artist from Connecticut, was the grandson of George Frederick Shrady, President Grant's physician and a son of Henry Merwin Shrady, the sculptor of the equestrian statue of General Grant at the east end of the Mall.

Further, to the relief of John Larcombe, the chapel's builder and donor of the great limestone columns of the nave, his gifts were stripped of their colorful paint and restored to their simple glory. While adding a series of frescos to the walls of the nave in 1946, a German artist from Philadelphia had also painted the columns.

Several other gifts completed the bicentennial renovations. The architect, John Syvertsen, created the Shrine of Our Lady of the Fields in the south transept. In it was displayed a statue of the Blessed Mother and Infant Child with Mary holding sheaves of wheat and clusters of grapes. Of Belgian or French origin, it was donated by former university president Father Timothy S. Healy, S.J. By far the most impressive addition to the renovated chapel was the pipe organ, a bicentennial gift from the Landegger family. Produced by the Bedient Pipe Organ Company of Lincoln, Nebraska, it contained 19 stops and 1,254 pipes.

As might be expected, these changes did not escape criticism from the Jesuit community as well as from other sources. Some objected to the new location of the tabernacle in the north transept as they preferred to have the Sacrament before them when praying, which was not readily possible in the new setting. Others disapproved the new placing of the reconciliation room behind the reredos in the sanctuary because of the lack of privacy when going to confession. Further, the elevated platforms were viewed as potentially dangerous for both celebrants and servers, particularly in view of an accident suffered by one of the Eucharistic ministers. The absence of the body of Christ on the suspended cross was also a cause for complaint. But the most vocal criticism was directed at the new organ because it obstructed the view of the Blessed Thomas More window, it took up too much space, and its volume was perceived as overpowering. In fact, two rows of chairs had to be removed, but space was gained elsewhere so the chapel could still seat 250 people.

Notwithstanding the controversy, the organ was dedicated in November 1989, and on January 20, 1990, the chapel's new altar was dedicated at a vigil Mass offered by Washington's Auxiliary Bishop Alvaro Corrada del Rio, S.J., before a packed house, including Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, Georgetown's faculty, students, and administrators.

Evoking no controversy, a more recent addition graced the corner of the north transept, providing a subtle balance to the sculpture of the Lady of the Fields. Donated by Heinrich and Brigitte Schulte zur Hausen, the statue of the "Verkundigungsengel" (The Angel of the Annunciation) in memory of their father was carved in linden wood in the second half of the 15th century in Germany.

The Studious Monk

The visitor enjoying the tranquil atmosphere of the quadrangle and gazing at the fine architecture of the chapel might be surprised to find the sculpture of a monk next to the gutter on the wall of the north transept. Mystery shrouded this unusual adornment for many years. A rumor ascribed the work to an unknown sculptor, more tramp than educated, who created it

Father J. Havens Richards, S.J.

as a token of gratitude for a meal at the college. A poem, "The Monk's Head," found in the university's archives, told a similar story. The origin of this mysterious work of art was finally explained when a letter written by Father Richards in 1916 was discovered which laid to rest any further speculation.

In reply to an enquiry from Father Frank A. Barnum, S.J., Richards had explained that when the chapel was being built, James Farrington Earley (sometimes spelled Early), a stone carver from Dublin, Ireland, and his younger brother came to Washington looking for work, which they found for a short time in the firm of Simpson & Barry, the chapel's architects. One day James spotted a big stone under the gutter on the north side of the chapel and asked Father Richards for permission to carve a sculpture. Three hours later he had completed his work; a monk in tunic and hood, with a warm smile, reading a folio. Richards was impressed at "the readiness and rapidity with which a comparatively uneducated craftsman designed in his own mind and executed in solid stone so beautiful a work in the space of about three hours." He praised Earley as "a real medieval craftsman, full of artistic ideas and needing no plans or drawings and filled with enthusiasm for his work."

Twenty years later when this letter came to his attention, Father Arthur A. O'Leary, S.J., then president of Georgetown, wrote to his long-time friend John J. Earley, also a sculptor in Washington, enquiring about a possible family connection. O'Leary's intuition proved correct; James Farrington Earley was indeed none other than John J. Earley's father. John remembered climbing on the scaffolding where his father was at work and falling to the ground. O'Leary's curiosity was piqued, and in response to his enquiry John J. Earley gave some information on his father's background, which was slightly different from Father Richards' account. James Farrington Earley hailed from Birmingham, England, studied at the Royal Academy in London, and came to Washington in the 1880s. He established his own architectural stone carving and modeling business and became well known. His works included carvings in the Franciscan Monastery, the altar rail at St. Patrick's Church, and ornaments on *The Evening Star* building, all in Washington. He received a medal from Pope Leo XIII and a silver medal at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. Earley died in Washington in 1906 and was buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

James Earley's initiative and good work paid off. He lost his bid for the altar in the chapel, but obtained the contract for carving the capitols of the four columns in the nave. His stone carving business was carried on and expanded by his son John who was so successful that he was acclaimed as "the man who made concrete beautiful." The mystery of the monk's sculptor was unveiled, but the story must not have been widely publicized because as late as 1946 *The Times Herald* still deplored the fact that the creator of the "Studious Monk" remained unknown.

Some Special Celebrations

Dahlgren Chapel has served not only as the center for the students' religious services, but also as the site of many special events over the decades. In 1901, for example, three high-ranking Osage Indians attended benediction in the chapel. This service gained significance when it was discovered that Elizabeth Dahlgren was a cousin of Mother Katharine Drexel, a staunch supporter of the Indian cause. In 1904 the university's Sodality of Mary Immaculate, the oldest

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Lehr on their wedding trip, 1901.

in the nation, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This event was memorialized by the graduating class with a marble tablet placed prominently on the north side of the chapel vestibule. In 1920 the chapel witnessed for the first time the baccalaureate ceremonies previously held at Georgetown's Holy Trinity Church. On December 13, 1931, a *Te Deum* celebrated the 150th anniversary of the American victory at Yorktown. The selection of the date coincided with two events in 1781: the U.S. Congress declared December 13 a day of thanksgiving and prayer, and King Louis XVI ordered a *Te Deum* sung in all churches and chapels in France in gratitude for the victory to which the French had made a significant contribution.

Over the years several noted Jesuits pronounced their final vows in the chapel. Among them was Edmund A. Walsh, who would later on establish the university's School of Foreign Service. In 1989 a Mass was celebrated to remember the 42nd birthday of the American journalist, Terry Anderson, who had been held hostage for more than four years in Beirut, Lebanon. Father O'Donovan welcomed the guests who included well-known journalists and relatives of other American hostages. In 1993 Georgetown University commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the official name of the Dahlgren Chapel) with a special two-month celebration.

Epilogue

And what was the fate of Elizabeth Dahlgren, the moving spirit and benefactress of the chapel, and Father J. Havens Richards, the Georgetown president responsible for erection of the chapel? Elizabeth Dahlgren maintained her relationship with Georgetown only for a brief time. Two years after her husband's death she returned to the campus with her escort, Harry S. Lehr, a popular member of the New York social elite and dubbed by some as the "Four Hundreds' playboy." Later on his impersonation of the Russian Czar at a social event earned him the title "King Lehr." Subsequently Elizabeth requested that Masses be sung, the last time in 1912 following the death of her mother.

In 1901 Elizabeth married Harry S. Lehr in a much- publicized ceremony in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, the setting of her first wedding. From then on she found herself swept up in the gay social whirl of the "Gilded Age." The Lehrs, like others in their social set, wintered in their luxurious residence in New York City, spent spring in Europe, and enjoyed the summer in their beautiful home in Newport, Rhode Island. The couple loved living in France, and a few years before World War I they bought a house in Paris on the rue de Lille where they entertained the rich and famous. The Lehrs spent most of the war years in Paris where Elizabeth joined other Americans in caring for the sick and wounded. She lent support to charities, gave her car to the Red Cross, and donated $10,000 to the "Comite Americain des Regions Devastees," an organization that cared for homeless women and children. Elizabeth also entertained the hospital staff

and patients of the American Ambulance Service at weekly teas, wrote letters for the wounded, and welcomed servicemen into her home. She maintained membership in the "Magna Carta Dames," "The Americans of Royal Descent," "The Plantagenets Descendants," and the local chapter of the Dames of America.

After the death of Harry S. Lehr in 1929, Elizabeth was drawn again to Paris where she bought a 17th century mansion, the Hotel de Savoie, on the rue de Saints Peres. She refurbished it, and her good taste and innate penchant for style made it into a most elegant residence where she welcomed high society at lavish parties. At that time Elizabeth described her life with Lehr among the socially prominent in her book *King Lehr and the Gilded Age*, which was published in 1935 and, according to *The New York Times*, received wide attention throughout the country. The following year she married an Irish peer, John Graham Hope de la Poer Beresford, fifth baron Decies. The marriage was short lived and ended in separation. Her second book, *Turn of the World*, published in 1937, which she authored as Lady Decies, Elizabeth Wharton Drexel Beresford, Baroness, was dedicated to "France My Beloved France." It provided details about her social life, recalled memories of the war years in Paris as well as her experience as one of the peeresses at the coronation of King George VI in 1937. Following the German occupation of France in 1940 Elizabeth returned to the United States, where she died four years later at the Hotel Shelton in New York. She was buried in the crypt of Dahlgren chapel. Most of her large estate, willed to her son, provided funds for the restoration of the chapel in 1964.

Father Richards' life story might not have been as glamorous as Elizabeth Dahlgren's, but he made his mark by leaving an important legacy at Georgetown and by standing as a shining example of the power of faith and determination in coping with physical adversities while pursuing a demanding professional career. During his ten years as president of the university, he made significant improvements in the physical plant as well as in the academic curriculum. Someone wrote that, "When he commenced his duties the College looked like a poverty stricken school, when he finished, it looked like a prosperous institution." Father Coleman

***Elizabeth Lady Decies** in the robes she wore at the Coronation of George VI.*

Nevils, S.J., in his informative book, *Miniatures of Georgetown 1634-1934*, praised Richards' presidency as "a golden age... of scholastic, social, cultural and educational prosperity, unsurpassed at any other time" in the school's history. Dahlgren Chapel was only one of his achievements. Others included completion of the Healy building, celebration of Georgetown's centennial in 1889, remodeling of the college library with a generous donation by the well-known Washington banker E. Francis Riggs, reorganization of the program at the Observatory, and expansion of the curriculum of the Law and Medical Schools.

Richards' numerous responsibilities and duties required an exacting schedule, which proved detrimental to his health. Four years after taking office at Georgetown he wrote John Vinton Dahlgren that, "the spiritual and even intellectual life caused by the office are great trials to me." Two years later he pleaded with the Provincial to change his assignment. "I wish that you would begin early to make

arrangements to relieve me from this dreadful office of Rector next summer... I am getting old and forget all I know, but if put at teaching soon, I hope to be able to do something respectable." His deteriorating health prompted him to reiterate his request. "I beseech you to take the proper means to set me free and to return me to private life," he wrote in 1897. Finally his pleas were heard, and he began his retirement in July 1898.

Departure from Georgetown marked the beginning of twenty-five more years of service to the Church and the Jesuit Order. For several years he served as Spiritual Father at the Jesuit novitiate in Maryland and at Boston College where his already frail health further deteriorated. Hoping that a change in climate would improve his condition, he spent a few months at the Jesuit novitiate at Los Gatos in California. In 1903 he was back in New York, serving as Spiritual Father in the Jesuit novitiate, St. Andrew on Hudson, Minister and Prefect of Studies at Canisius College in Buffalo, and rector of a high school as well as rector and pastor of St. Ignatius Church, both in New York City.

Notwithstanding this heavy schedule, he managed to publish not only numerous articles, but in 1913 a biography of his father, Henry Livingston Richards, entitled *A Loyal Life*. He also completed a drama depicting the martyrdom of St. Isaac Jogues, S.J. With health further declining, he again requested to be relieved of duties, and for two years he led a quiet life at the Manresa Institute near South Norwalk, Connecticut, where, in 1922, he celebrated his golden jubilee as a Jesuit. One last assignment took him as Spiritual Father and Procurator to the Jesuits' new house of studies at Weston, Massachusetts. There his infirmities became increasingly stressful, and after suffering two strokes he died at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 9, 1923. He was laid to rest at the college cemetery.

Bibliographic note: *Primary sources for this history are located in the various collections in Georgetown University's archives, the holdings of the Woodstock Library, and the city and campus newspapers. Major events in the history of the university and its chapel are detailed in the works of five Jesuit historians: Robert E. Curran's* The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University, vol. I, (1993), *John M. Daly's* Georgetown University: Origin and Early Years (1957), *Joseph T. Durkin's two volume history (1963), William C. McFadden (ed.),* Georgetown at Two Hundred (1990), *and Coleman Nevils'* Miniatures of Georgetown 1634-1934. *Two early histories, James S. Easby-Smith's two volume* Georgetown University in the District of Columbia 1789-1907, *and John Gilmary Shea's* Memorial of the First Centenary of Georgetown College, D.C. (1891), *were also useful. Elizabeth Dahlgren's later years are entertainingly outlined in her memoirs:* King Lehr and the Gilded Age (1935), *and* Turn of the World (1937).

Suggested Reading:

The History of Black Catholics in the United States, by Cyprian Davis, Crossroads, New York, 1991, 347 pp.

African Americans have constituted a small but significant component of America's Catholic congregation over the centuries, yet until recent times their contribution to the advance of the Church has been largely ignored. All that changed in the wake of the civil rights revolution of the 1960s when black Catholics, and some of their white brethren, began to learn something about African Americans, especially their enduring loyalty to the Church in the face of prevailing discrimination, their influence on the evolving liturgy with its strong emphasis on a Spirit-driven worship, and their whole-hearted embrace of parish life and support for Catholic organizations. During the last half-century many monographs have examined the different elements of the black Catholic experience, but not until 1991 did the eminent black historian and professor of Church history, Benedictine Father Cyprian Davis, produce the first comprehensive survey of black Catholics throughout American history.

Davis's vast erudition, couched in an engag-